

Steal This Hook! Found in an Old Book

By Doug Beyer



Welcome again to Steal This Hook! This edition's theme is *found in an old book*: adventure hooks that begin with someone cracking open the pages of a careworn tome, for good or for ill. (Hey, who are we kidding? Of course it's for ill). Unleash one or more of these on your players, and show them that ignorance may in fact be bliss!

The Blank Codex

The uncle of one of the PCs dies and leaves his adventuring nephew or niece a curious old codex bound in leather and locked with a *keycharm* (*Shadows of the Last War*, pg. 24). The cover has no title but is decorated with circular sigils. When they get it open, its pages are blank -- yet the book radiates magic! It turns out that each page is written with a special kind of *illusory script*: unreadable unless certain conditions are met. Some of the pages are time-based: one becomes readable when the plane of Dolurrh is waxing, for example. Others are based on characteristics of the reader: only elves or those with the Mark of Handling can read certain pages.



What can be read there? The book is the journal of a wizard and Last War veteran in the uncle's family (the wizard's *arcane mark* is probably on it somewhere). The wizard traveled extensively and saw many wonders and mysteries, making the book a gold mine of potential adventures. Now that it has emerged, the book may also draw attention to the heroes. A representative of House Sivis would pay handsomely for such a work of scribing; enemies of the old wizard may try to steal it; and an obsessed cultist who believes it may contain a map to a protected seal may threaten or kill the heroes for it.

The Henge in the Gloaming

In the Eldeen city of Xandrar, Gatekeeper druids are concerned about signs that the poaching of good creatures in the Towering Wood has increased. They ask the PCs for help investigating these crimes against their faith. It turns out that someone has been buying up pixie wings, giant eagle feathers, and unicorn horns, and payment has always been in the form of letters of credit from Morgrave University.

Meanwhile, in the thickest, darkest, most claustrophobic grove of The Gloaming, a Druidic Studies student and his horrid ape companions work tirelessly to build... something. They fell trees. They move huge, oblong stones. They arrange a collection of wings, feathers, and horns on a rune-covered stone slab, following exactly the diagrams and directions in a set of Old Galifar scrolls titled *A Dialectical Discussion of the Planes*, by Professor Uric Helbaine, paying special attention to the third scroll: "Musings concerning the Early-Walkers and their Connection with Mabar." The heroes must not only confront the misguided student but also deal with the disastrous consequences of focusing the Gloaming's negative energies through the mystical henge dreamed up

by the long-dead Professor Helbaine.

The Almanac of Tomorrow

In a dungeon beneath the Mournlands, the heroes discover a chamber full of loose parchment pages (note: fire hazard!). Buried under the pages are the remains of a magical almanac that adds a new page to itself each day. Years ago, the book's cover burst under the strain of the stream of new pages, and now the dungeon room is packed with them. Each page carries the date it was created and makes predictions about what will happen *tomorrow* (that's tomorrow from the day the page was created). They predict weather patterns, casualty numbers, troop movements, and other significant events.

The most recent page reports that a disaster will occur tomorrow, and the heroes may be able to prevent it! Perhaps it reports that, despite the Last War being over, tomorrow's "casualty numbers" are in the hundreds, and it states "Cyre" is moving troops toward the border of Thrane (which could mean the Lord of Blades is planning an attack). Perhaps it reports a weather disaster brought on by a rogue member of House Lyrandar. It may report pestilence and famine that the heroes know to be caused by an evil curse.

The almanac loses accuracy if it is removed from the dungeon chamber but still produces useful information. Investigating its origin might lead to further adventures.

Expedition of the Tome of Glyphs

The heroes' patron informs them of rumors that the true Tome of Glyphs, a legendary book detailing the history of giants in Xen'drik, may be located in a dungeon in the misty jungles of Q'barra. An archaeologist and linguist of Sharn, Brenna Downen, will accompany the adventurers and help them follow a set of clues to the whereabouts of the dungeon.

At the dungeon entrance, they find the deserted camp of a rival expedition. They may be too late! Inside the dungeon, the party comes upon a hexagonal chamber containing six enormous books (each about the size of a noble's bed) on heavy display stands. Which is the right one? Bloody smears on the floor lead to one wall. Then the books attack! The party has been lured into the lair of six mimics (or whatever number your PCs can handle). The previous expedition was subdued or destroyed, and their remains are poorly hidden behind a secret door at the end of the trail of blood. Is the real Tome of Glyphs somewhere in this dungeon, or was a crafty illithid using the legend to lure adventurers into its mimic-lair? Perhaps Brenna Downen tricked the party for her own reasons.

Monsters in the Library Basement

Mr. Pumble Dombibbin, a night clerk at the Library of Korranberg, calls the adventurers' for help one moonless evening. He trapped two monsters in the bottom floor of the Library, which houses books in storage. Only the heavy door leading to the stairwell has kept them at bay. Dombibbin has no explanation for how the monsters got into the Library; he just wants them captured and removed. He insists they not be killed and will give the heroes a handsome reward if they succeed quickly.

The PCs stalk the monsters among the dark corridors and dusty stacks. Behind an iron door labeled "Rare Books," whose lock is broken, they come face-to-face with a pair of fihyrs (*Monster Manual II*, or substitute any aggressive monsters with appropriate CR). The fihyrs are actually Mr. Dombibbin's sons, ages 12 and 10. There were accidentally transformed by a spell they read out of a nearby tome. The spell affected their minds, too, so

they believe themselves to be ferocious fiends. Mr. Dombibbin knows what happened but he will be in big trouble if his employers find out he allowed his boys to play in the stacks. He believes he can reverse the spell if the PCs trap the monstrous boys and recover the book they read.

Mini-Hooks

Still hungry for more adventure hooks? Here are some bite-sized book-themed ideas to chew on.

- What appears to be a book of spells is actually a recipe for an extended magical ritual to call down meteors from the Ring of Siberys -- with the power to destroy an entire city.
- In the ruins of a half-sunk Shadow Marches temple, the heroes discover a set of stone tablets describing the location of an ancient artifact related to the daelkyr.
- A book of poetry with pages of fine vellum is found at an estate sale. The author turns out to be the personal scribe of old King Jarot. It could be full of clues of historical import, coveted by many nations.
- A financial ledger in the Mroor Holds reveals evidence that an underground organization seized a huge amount of resources through shrewd, almost prophetic business deals. Perhaps the Aurum has enslaved an earth weird to guide their business practices.
- The PCs are hired to steal a book from a private collection. The book itself is unimportant but it contains a magic dagger hidden in a hollowed-out space in the center pages, and the dagger is happy to be free.
- A student of the magical arts must finish her dissertation on necromantic phenomena before her academic deadline. She needs the heroes to bring her tissue or bone samples of at least three specific undead creatures within one week.
- A famous novel is delivered to one of the PCs -- with a message from the author penned in blood inside the front cover.

About the Author

Doug Beyer spent a lot of time getting philosophy degrees until he figured out that he should just move to Seattle and become a web developer for Wizards of the Coast. Now he spends his days working on games and his evenings playing them. Doug uses the time normally allotted for sleeping to lurk on the Wizards.com message boards as his alter ego, WotC_Doog.

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